

**Opening Statement**  
**Senator Charles Grassley, Chairman**  
**Senate Special Committee on Aging**  
**September 10, 1998**

Good morning. This hearing will come to order. As Chairman of the Special Committee on Aging it is my pleasure to welcome my colleagues, our witnesses, and members of the public to this important hearing. I extend a special welcome to those who traveled here today with a special mission to gather useful information and carry it back to their states and communities. Because it is an especially busy day of Senate business, I expect my colleagues to be coming and going.

This Committee has examined a number of important issues related to federal programs, especially the Medicare and Social Security programs. Today's hearing is different in the respect that there is no federal program for family caregiving. Yet, our witnesses will testify about the valuable contribution of more than 22 million family caregivers who are actively caring for an aging or ailing elderly family member. To put this number in perspective, there are less than 2 million Americans living in nursing homes. So, simply by looking at the numbers, we can conclude that the bulk of caring for our nation's elderly is carried out by family and friends in the form of informal caregiving.

I said that we would learn about the contributions made by these individuals. It is enormous. Economically, family caregiving is worth billions of dollars. Emotionally and physically, caregiving is often an overwhelming task. Caregivers know what it entails to juggle personal and professional demands with the responsibilities that accompany caregiving.

Nearly 75% of caregivers are women, most of whom work and also care for children and a spouse. This group of caregivers, often referred to as the 'sandwich generation', face particular challenges. The sacrifices made by these individuals not only improve the quality of life for those they care for, but save the public from what would be very expensive costs for caring for people who might otherwise require services in a hospital or nursing home. In both of these settings, the Medicare and Medicaid programs pay heavily. Today's hearing will more precisely examine the important and unique contributions of caregivers.

It is likely that many of you in the room here are caring for a family member. In fact, I know that two of the witnesses are caregivers. I'd like to take a minute to share a unique story of family caregiving. I should say that each family has a unique story since no two families are alike. One story I am familiar with is that of Marie Sommer. She is a 93 year old woman who lives close to my home in New Hartford, Iowa. Mrs. Sommer has a number of physical conditions which require special attention, including hypertension, macular degeneration, and arthritis. She is also a breast cancer survivor.

Despite busy lives of their own, including running a restaurant, her two daughters, Florence and Charlene Ingalls, have made it possible for Mrs. Sommers to remain at home. They have arranged their schedules so that they take turns with the responsibility of caring for their mother. I have tremendous respect and admiration for this family's commitment to caring for their mother. It is a huge effort.

I look forward to more stories of caregiving from our witnesses. By sharing their insight and expertise, I am confident that today's witnesses will contribute greatly to the objective of raising awareness of the value and importance of family caregiving. It is particularly important for policy makers to understand its importance in the long term care delivery system given the growing long-term care demands of our aging nation.

I am especially honored to have First Lady Rosalynn Carter here with us today. Mrs. Carter has had first-hand experience as a caregiver, which she will share with us today. She is the author of two books on caregiving. The most recent one offers help to those caring for someone with mental illness. I commend her for all her fine leadership in this area. I also want to welcome all the other witnesses here today and to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to appear before the committee.

On a related matter, I would like to announce that today I am introducing a bill that will help Americans prepare for the day that they might need long-term care and find themselves without a family member who can be their caregiver. This bill, titled ***"The Long Term Care and Retirement Security Act"*** will be introduced today. This legislation would help people who do not have access to subsidized long-term care plans through their jobs. It would allow them to deduct the cost of long-term care insurance premiums from their taxable income. The goal of this legislation is to help Americans plan responsibly for their later years.

Today's hearing will provide an in-depth look at the important policy issues related to family caregiving and provide an opportunity to look at innovative programs from around the country. With the growing number of older Americans, the demand for long term care services will increase drastically. The role fulfilled by family caregivers will also see new demands. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

### **SENATOR GRASSLEY'S TIPS FOR FAMILY CAREGIVERS BE INFORMED**

- **Learn about community resources.** Most communities have active volunteer and religious organizations with much to offer. A good place to start inquiring is the local area agency on aging.
- **Two out of three caregivers work. Find out if your employer offers long-term care benefits.** Many times, these benefits include attractive options for the caregiver.
- An elderly parent or spouse is likely to be a Medicare beneficiary. **Learn all you can about Medicare.** If this seems overwhelming, there are people who can help. Each state has an insurance counseling assistance program.
- **Stay organized.** Information is only useful if it can be used. Establish a system for keeping track of important information such as living wills, insurance documentation and property titles. Useful numbers such as bank accounts, Social Security and Medicare numbers should be kept handy. Consider memorizing.

### **BE PERSISTENT**

- **Stay persistent** in dealing with service providers. Ask "WHY" when you are told "NO." For instance, if your insurer tells you a certain service won't be covered, find out why. Maybe a doctor's note is all it takes to have a service or piece of equipment paid for by insurance.

### **BE SMART WITH MONEY**

- **Be proactive.** Planning ahead can keep you from feeling overwhelmed. You may be able to negotiate new payment plans for your existing financial responsibilities. For instance, some lenders may allow you a grace period during a month when your caregiving expenses are especially high.
- **Be prepared.** You may need to consider reorganizing your finances to help prepare for your new responsibilities. It's not important how much money you have, it's how you plan to use it. Some employers and banks offer financial consultation.

- **Shop around for financial protections.** Investigate long-term care insurance plans and long-term disability plans, especially if you are self-employed. If needed, this can be an important source of income. Insurance counselors can help, or you can do much exploring on the world wide web.
- Managing another person's finances can be tricky. If you're newly responsible for helping a family member or friend with their finances, you may need to **understand the legal aspects of this role.** Check with community resources about available legal assistance. You may need to learn such terms as "durable power of attorney" and "living will."